

## HOW DOES THE NEW CHURCH INCREASE?

“The new heaven increases, [and] the New Church descends from it ... to the extent that the false ideas of the former church are set aside” (*True Christian Religion* 784). Let us remove false ideas and replace them with true ones, and the New Church will grow. One such false dogma is instant salvation apart from means: The Lord can instantly remove all our evils, cleanse us, and lift us into heaven,—as is believed when someone claims to be “born again.”

But the idea of instant salvation or mercy apart from means, is the “flying fiery serpent” mentioned in Daniel: it abolishes obedience to the Ten Commandments and ends up attributing evil to God! (*Divine Providence* 340) For if God can raise anyone to heaven regardless of their life, while yet evil still happens in the world, then God is to blame, because He could wipe out all evil, but does not do so! Why not?

The truth however is that the Lord removes our evils only when we do so on our own. The very thought that regeneration (rebirth) thus salvation can happen without human cooperation, is “vanity of vanities” (*True Christian Religion* 577). Only as man on his own removes or shuns evils, does the Lord remove their roots as well as the evils themselves. The spiritual images connected with instant salvation is thus a “ruined city, a plain devastated by locusts, or keeping a viper warm next to one’s bosom” (*True Christian Religion* 582:2).

A complete and unexpurgated set of evil tendencies is received by everyone just by being born! Every Church that comes to an end, collapses from the accumulation of hereditary evil tendencies among its population. These we read are “multiplied and augmented in each descending posterity, remaining with each person, and increased in each by his actual sins”(*Arcana*

*Coelestia* 313). They are “never dissipated so as to become harmless except in those who are being regenerated by the Lord.”(ibid) This reduction or dissipation comes with the gift of “tendencies to good and truth” from parents who are being regenerated, and thus receptive of conjugal love (cf. *Conjugal Love* 202, *Arcana Coelestia* 3469). Mind you, these hereditary tendencies do not in and by themselves condemn anyone, only actual evils do (*Apocalypse Explained* 989). However, we leave them intact or ignore these tendencies at our peril, since we then condone the evils they sponsor! When we ignore them, it is like the Sons of Israel fearing the giants of the Promised Land. We are scared of conquering our own evil tendencies, since we don’t want to give them up. We like to experiment with our evils, creating worse temptations for ourselves. This is to wander for 40 years of our own making.

So we need to take special note and heed this warning: “EVILS CANNOT BE REMOVED UNLESS THEY APPEAR.” Wow, we have to actually “do evil” before we know what it is! But no: “This does *not* mean that man is to do evils in order that they may appear”( *Divine Providence* 278 emphasis added). We can never act out evil just to check whether it is in fact evil! That would be close to profanation. Instead, we must go to the opposite extreme, namely “examine not only [our] actions but also [our] thoughts, and what [we] would do if [we] were not afraid of the laws and disgrace.” We should especially imagine “what evils [we] hold in [our] spirit to be allowable and do not regard as sins; for these [we] still commit” (*Ibid*). “In their spirit” all people imagine secret evils. Because however our “thought is the process which purifies and excretes the evils” (*True Christian Religion* 659), i.e. our ideas picture our evil desires for recognition purposes, consequently we are not blamed for just thinking of evils. Instead, by seeing them first in thought we can thereby shun the desire. This is where our

tendencies to evils appear, where we see what we long for in spirit. We must identify and shun these as though they were vipers keeping warm in our bosom. Whether we tackle a tendency right off, or tackle an incipient evil practice, or a well rehearsed one, conquest requires a spiritual temptation,— the 40 years wandering in the wilderness. A temptation is spiritual when we call on the Lord’s help.

Do we sometimes get angry at God for all the innocent people who suffer beyond any reasonable explanation? “How could there be a God when this happens?” However, the answer stares us in the face: suffering happens because people do not hold themselves guilty of evils! That is why the Lord must jog people into a spiritual condition by permitting natural temptations, i.e. misfortunes and accidents, to “break down their pleasures” (*Arcana Coelestia* 762). If people did what they should, and held themselves guilty of evil, they would often be “exempted from common misfortunes” (*Spiritual Experience* 4630) since such things do not always happen to people “with whom the Lord is present” (*Op. Cit.* 4138). Catastrophe is loosely contingent on confessing guilt or not. It is therefore no use to be angry at God for disasters, but instead to examine oneself even when distant disaster strikes others.

However, to be good we need to look beneath the surface, and call for the Lord’s help. Self-examination, repentance and reformation are the means of mercy, because we can undertake them consciously. Regeneration is only partially a conscious effort, but mostly “on the job”, i.e. while we are at work (cf. *True Christian Religion* 580). We don’t notice it in progress since no one is capable of “reflecting on his own regeneration” (*Arcana Coelestia* 933). No one can see oneself being led en route to heaven, since it would just look like a construction zone (cf. *Divine Providence* 203)! Still, our evil tendencies are actually “removed” while we are planning and carrying out our business

or employment (*Divine Providence* 296:10). We make our decisions for heaven when we honestly carry out the terms of our employment. No wonder heaven is a kingdom of uses.

Now when we begin to examine ourselves, do we see no end to our evils? Hell actually is bottomless, and so also our evil tendencies seem to defy our repentance! Instead we picture ourselves going to hell with flying colors. However, we must resist feeling totally unworthy, and saturated with evils. We cannot tackle all of hell at once, as in eastern meditation trying to rise above the entire field of “maya” and “sangsara”, i.e. ignorance and illusion. We could go crazy if we try! Instead, the Lord’s “easy yoke” is to shun only one evil at a time, once or twice a year. Is that too much to ask? Pick a tendency, examine it in private, see the guilt, then confess it to the Lord alone while you are “in your room and the door is shut”(Matthew 6:6). This means a secret confession unseen by others (*Arcana Coelestia* 5694:4), for only then is the prayer “from the Lord” (*Apocalypse Explained* 695:4).

Can we be successful at a purely mental event such as repentance? Yes. It is actual repentance when we say to ourselves, “Although I think and want this evil”—fill in the blank by actually naming it so that both you and the Lord can hear it, —then finish “I will not do it, because it is a sin” (*True Christian Religion* 535). You may add a call for the Lord’s help, for strength to do His will or to obey His Word, all in the Lord’s name. If we also pray for something or someone, we must end the prayer with the sentiment, “nevertheless not my will or way, but Thine be done” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8179:3), or else we are too cocky for our prayer to be heard.

Do we understand just how the Lord can save us? “It is by means of the truths in anyone that the Lord has the power to save you; for you are reformed and regenerated and taken out of hell and introduced into heaven by means of truth from the sense of

the letter of the Word. This power the Lord took upon Himself, even as to His Divine Human, after He had fulfilled all things of the Word down to its ultimate level” (*Sacred Scripture* 49).

We need therefore to include the Scriptures, both Testaments, in our self-examination and prayers for help. Use Bible quotes you love and remember. We should not abstain from “...evils for any reason whatever *except from the Word*” since nothing else than the Word can “purify the internal man” (*Apocalypse Explained* 803 added emphasis). Do we dare check out the wrong reasons for repentance, which do not work? “Fear of civil law and penalties, fear of the loss of your reputation, or honor, the fears of becoming poor” etc. in short fear of ‘getting caught.’ They don’t work.

Part of the problem of confessing our evils, is that we feel guilty also of evils which have been done to us. An abused or victimized person, especially a child, feels guilty of what has happened to them! It helps to understand the reason: guilt and torments of conscience are inspired by devils who accuse us of the “very evils they themselves inspire” (*Arcana Coelestia* 751, 761, 8159). Being a victim of evil thus means we inherit an unfair guilt. That is because we are innocent of the harm done to us! The “torment of conscience” victims feel, therefore do not belong to them, but to “the very evils which belong to devils, in hell” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6097, 7344). We therefore need not shun evil done to us, but place the torment of guilt at the gate of hell. Both the harm and the guilt came from hell. That is why devils inspire the thought that we are “already saved” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2380:4,5), trying to confuse us out of further attempts. Angels however know that “No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:51-62). They inspire the thought to always keep moving forward, that you are “not saved” (Ibid.). We cannot freeze up, but keep going forward.

Now the Writings have unmasked devils and evil spirits, so we can see their tactics. They not only inspire us from hell with evil desires, but hand over guilt and torment as well. To counteract this blow, we are told to picture evil as pouring into us from the outside. Don't you remember this quote? "If man believed, as is the truth, that ...all evil and falsity is from hell, he would not...appropriate evil to himself and account himself responsible for it"—nor would he claim credit for the good that comes from the Lord (*Arcana Coelestia* 6324, *Heaven and Hell* 302e, *Divine Providence* 320)! It is actually easier to repent of evils if we think of them being beamed up from hell. Shunning evils as sins is then a matter of blocking their entrance. Only the Lord has power to prevent their entry, by virtue of His conquest of hell. We can think, "I can shun this evil [= prevent entry] because of Easter."

Another trap in confession is to make oneself guilty of too much! "Confession of all sins is the lulling to sleep of all, and at length blindness" (*Divine Providence* 278). So don't confess guilt to "evils of all kinds"! We blind ourselves if we say we are steeped in sin. We have to be specific, and name just one thing which it hurts most to hear announced! So we say it to ourselves, and our intention is then already worthy of forgiveness. An evil confessed is already known and forgiven by the Lord, because He caused us to see it! Anyone need not "enumerate" the evils because he has "searched them out and seen them in himself, and consequently they are present to the Lord because they are present to himself. The Lord has also guided the person in self-examination, disclosed the sins, and inspired sadness and together with this an effort to desist from them and begin a new life" (*True Christian Religion* 539). The Lord already led you to see it, and so by your secret confession to the Lord, you are already forgiven. But that does not mean it is gone: we have to stop it in our lives. That is when the evil is also "remitted", i.e.

sent out of our lives. We have to face down the evil we have confessed, not allowing it back.

We do this by remembering the Sacrament we have taken, so that “if he afterwards [after the holy supper] abstains from one or another sin which he then discovers in himself, this is sufficient to initiate him into the actuality [of the repentance]” (*True Christian Religion* 530). For the Holy Supper is a sacrament of repentance (*Apocalypse Revealed* 531, *Brief Exposition* 114, *True Christian Religion* 567) which thus introduces us into heaven while still on earth. The memory of our resolve at the Holy Supper together with the letter of the Word later acts as a bulwark against the hells. Because the “bread and wine correspond to heavenly bread and wine” which in turn “correspond to the holy of love and holy of faith, both from the Lord, and both the Lord”, therefore the Lord is conjoined “not with the bread and wine, but with the love and faith of the man who has repented” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 224). The bread and wine are necessary elements, but the conjunction with the Lord is with the repentant frame of mind. How can we imagine any closer conjunction? The after-effect of the sacrament, is consequently to abstain from the evil we have already confessed. Our earlier prayer not to do it becomes fulfilled in “I will not do it” now, in act. The evil is then remitted, also called “doing the work of repentance” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 159, 161). We have finally overcome that temptation, and the evil has lost its appeal, or begun to do so.

Here therefore are the “means of salvation” whereby the Lord’s mercy raises us to heaven, all through our lives. The dragon of instant salvation or faith alone, that old serpent, is thrust through by Michael’s sword.